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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, January 8, 1940.

Subject: "THEY STAYED WHERE THEY WERE." Information from the Soil Conservation Service and the Farm Security Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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When the government buys up submarginal land after experts have declared it unfit for farming, that land may be put back into trees, used for grazing developed as a wild life refuge, or it may become an experimental ground for some special practice in soil conservation.

But what becomes of the people who formerly lived on the submarginal land? Where do they go? How do they get started in another locality?

Generally such families are assisted to make a new start somewhere else where the land is better. But once in a while, families simply don't want to leave the surroundings they have become used to. Whatever the drawbacks, the submarginal area is home to them. This was the case with a number of families in northwest Florida. They were living on cut-over and waste land unfit to support them. The government bought about 200,000 acres of this land in 1935, and it is now being developed for forestry purposes by the Soil Conservation Service.

Here is an interesting report by William A. Allaband, area conservationist for northwestern Florida, telling how some of these families were provided for within the reforestation project. He says:

"Each family had to be considered as a separate problem. The Farm Security Administration offered financial aid in the form of grants and loans to induce them to move to more suitable locations. But very few persons took advantage of the offer. Some couldn't find any new location, where they would be permanently better off. As one man said, 'I know every tree and pig path in this section and I can't bring myself to the point of leaving it. This is home.'



"But when the W.P.A. offered a wage of \$21 a month to laborers employed in the cut-over land, many of the men were glad to take the work if they could live where they were or nearby. The technicians of the project found that there were small scattered parcels of land within the general area which could be used for farming. So they decided to place as many of the families as they could on these better parcels of land and help them to get on a solid footing. With a food garden and a small cash income from their work, they were better off than before.

"There were a number of partly completed, abandoned houses bought by the government with the property. These houses were the ghosts of a French Canadian land colonization scheme that failed dismally.

"The Soil Conservation Service picked a section within the reforestation area near the town of Munson, where the land promised well for cultivation. Here they laid out a group of about 15 farms to start with. Each farm unit was from 18 to 30 acres in size and planned as a little homestead. An area was reserved for a house lot big enough to permit landscaping in front and fruit production in the rear. A food garden, chicken run and acreage for a cash crop were planned. Each unit was completely enclosed with the fencing saved from former days, so that the families could have milk and meat animals, and keep them within bounds.

"Then the technicians made plans for moving the partially completed houses and remodeling them into comfortable small homes of 4 to 6 rooms with screened front and back porches. They drove deep wells beside each house site and built barns and chicken houses and other buildings from salvaged lumber.

"They moved the houses from 8 to 10 miles from their original locations in the former French Canadian colony. This was done without great difficulty by means of a heavy duty trailer."

Of course the interiors of all the houses had to be finished, front and back porches added, roofs and windows repaired, new chimneys erected, windows and porches



screened, and the exteriors painted. The final result was a very comfortable house, much better than the bare two and three-room shacks the families formerly occupied.

The farms are rented to the families who occupy them. Permits are renewed only if the farms are operated in a satisfactory way. But there were many more applicants for houses than houses available, and Mr. Allaband reports that all the families appear to be happy in their new homes and wish to renew their rental permits.

The Farm Security Administration provided 5-year loans for buying work stock, some farm equipment, seed, fertilizer, feed, live stock and canning equipment. Loans were limited to barely what was needed to begin farming. The borrowers were expected to participate in community arrangements for the use of farm equipment with other borrowers, and to get other things they needed from supplementary earnings on the project. Each family has one or more men who work part-time on the woodland project and take care of their own food gardens in their spare time. The families soon formed a small "co-op" to buy and sell more economically, and to foster social gatherings in the community. The church and the school at Munson are both going again after a long period of inactivity.

That's the picture as reported by Mr. Allaband. That is how families on one land-use project are being helped to get off to a new start. But, Mr. Allaband points out, the welfare of these families and of the project will probably become increasingly better each year as the forest becomes re-established.

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